

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY*

LOUIS HARRIS SURVEY

1. *THE MEDICAL community today is aware that while the "information explosion" has had tremendously positive impact, it has created problems that must be dealt with. The "explosion" has made it very difficult for both scientists and clinicians to keep up with their fields, and it has created a lack of space and overcrowded shelves in medical libraries. The increasing cost of maintaining a library with acceptable standards is also considered a serious problem.*

2. *Among all user groups, deans, and chief librarians, there is overwhelming agreement that "the information explosion in the medical sciences has made computerized information systems technology an essential component in a university, medical school, or hospital." They similarly agree that with this technology, greater amounts of information are available in a much shorter time than was true years ago, and they feel that fast and reliable access to information may be essential for the difference between life and death.*

3. *All spectra of the medical community agree that the "publish or perish" ethic needs reevaluation. From 88% of deans to 100% of affiliate hospitals' chief librarians think that it is time to focus on quality instead of quantity in publications.*

4. *The size of a library's collection should not be the main measure of its quality. Not only is size no longer an adequate or fair measure of quality, but a least eight in ten of all users and 98% of deans say the power of the library's access and retrieval technology is vital. Chief librarians are also nearly unanimous in their agreement.*

5. *Medical school deans see the quality of the library and information retrieval facilities as being of only middling importance in determining the overall standing of a medical school. They place much greater emphasis on such other factors as the quality of the hospitals with which the school is affiliated and the academic credentials of the faculty. On the other hand, they feel that the medical school accrediting committee places much more importance on the quality and direction of the curriculum and the caliber of the school's students.*

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6. *Despite the exponential growth of information, the majorities of all user groups (basic science and clinical faculty, medical students, residents, and office-based physicians) feel that ALL materials of both potential scholarly interest and clinical relevance should be kept in medical school libraries, regardless of how often they are used. Deans and librarians were much less certain that this is appropriate.*

7. *The only suggested measure to increase efficiency and cut costs that would be willingly accepted by a majority of any group is limiting the number of archival books available in the library. The least popular idea is having a rule which would restrict access to the library's online computerized databases to professionals trained in efficient search strategies. At most, only 22% of clinical faculty and 21% of office-based physicians say they would be very willing to go along with this.*

8. *Regarding organizing databases to help offset the information overload, all groups are squeamish about selective input, but are somewhat more receptive to selective output. From 57% of office-based physicians to 72% of both medical students and chief librarians at medical school libraries, this is their preferred option.*

9. *When asked what criteria to use to rank articles as reliable sources of information as well as for deciding upon input and retrieval, the relevance of the article to a scientific inquiry or research problem is deemed most important. In general, the author's credentials and prior publication achievements are seen more as "somewhat," rather than "very" important.*

10. *Medical school faculty members have the greatest access to personal computers, though substantial majorities of other user groups also own or have access to a personal computer. However, about a third of all medical students, residents, and office-based physicians neither own nor have access to a personal computer.*

11. *Access to online databases is almost universal in the medical community. 77% of basic scientists, 80% of clinical researchers, 78% of residents, 67% of medical students, and 62% of office-based physicians have used these in the last 12 months. However, of those users who have access to online computerized databases, 55% of medical students, 54% of office-based physicians, 46% of residents, 44% of basic science faculty, and 43% of clinical faculty rarely or never use the databases in the library to track down specific types of information.*

12. *Medical professionals and students are still quite dependent upon the printed word as a reference source. Overwhelming majorities say their own printed sources are still the media most often used when they need to track down specific information.*

13. *Overall, office-based physicians seem to be the least informed of the members of the medical community.* They annually read the fewest number of books; over half of them who have access to a medical school library use a hospital library (which is less well stocked) instead; 26% of them have no access to databases, and of those who do, 37% have not used one during the past year.